



AOT in Action

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director Margie A. Emmermann:

Good morning,

How *sweet* it is to live in Arizona!

On Saturday, February 14, celebrate Valentine's Day and Arizona's Statehood Day! This year, our state turns 97 years old and continues to offer inspiring unforgettable southwest moments to residents and travelers alike.

Speaking of *traveling*...

The City of Phoenix and the Greater Phoenix CVB have done an extraordinary job planning and preparing for the NBA All-Star 2009, to be held at the US Airways Arena, beginning with the Rookie Challenge on Friday, February 13. The excitement continues on Saturday with NBA All-Star Saturday Night, featuring several competitions including the Three-Point Shootout and Slam Dunk Contest, and culminates with the NBA All-Star Game on Sunday.

The NBA All-Star 2009 events include the biggest names in basketball and draws celebrities and corporate executives from across the world. A television audience spanning more than 200 countries will be watching on TNT, and seeing glimpses of Arizona's scenic beauty. This translates into huge exposure and is yet another effective way to attract visitors.

For a complete listing of this weekends NBA events, visit www.nba.com/allstar2009/.

For Valentine travel packages, check out the Travel Deals section at www.arizonaguide.com.

Have a good week.

AOT News

AOT Staff Selected for NTA Leadership Team

Jennifer Sutcliffe, AOT's Travel Industry Marketing Manager, has been selected to serve on the 2009 National Tour Association Leadership Team. As a member of this team, Jennifer will assist the NTA Board of Directors in the decision-making process by acting as a vital link between the general membership and the board. In this voluntary position, Jennifer will serve on the "Identity Task Force," a committee that will look at the membership demographics as well as the current and future member needs as it relates to the association's brand and identity. NTA develops its Leadership Team with the knowledge and experience of its members to help develop future NTA programs. The National Tour Association is the preferred association in the tourism industry for packaged travel professionals. For more information about NTA, visit www.ntaonline.com.

New Updates to AOT's Research Web site!

The following items have been updated in the Research and Statistics section of AOT's business-to-business Web site www.azot.gov.

- [National Park Visitation December 2008](#)

For additional information or questions, please contact Beth Billings, Research Specialist, at 602-364-3689 or via e-mail at bbillings@azot.gov.

Industry Professional Profile

Char Beltran, President & CEO of the Lake Havasu City Convention and Visitors Bureau

For more than 28 years, Char Beltran has been a driving force within the tourism industry.

After working with the Greater Phoenix Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), the Corpus Christi CVB and the Sedona Chamber of Commerce, Char will be applying her vast experience to her new position as the President & CEO of the Lake Havasu City Convention and Visitors.

Here is a brief profile on Char. >>**Read Full Profile**

1) How did you get involved in the tourism industry?

I started in the Travel & Tourism Industry as a travel agent in Flagstaff. Looking back it seemed like a natural progression to go from travel agent to tour operator to airline and rental car reservationists to airline sales representative to hotel sales and finally to destination marketing!

2) What do you enjoy most about your job?

I enjoy finding ways to create a positive economic impact for the community by generating visitor spending. Easily said but, a very complex and at times challenging job.

3) Why is your role important to the tourism industry?

The role of a CEO in a Destination Marketing Organization of a community carries tremendous responsibility. This position is charged with managing political issues,

training and overseeing staff, always putting the community's interests first when promoting the destination and understanding how to work with the Board of Directors to convey the impact of visitor dollars.

In my opinion, one of the most important roles for the CEO is to educate community leaders and staff about our competition. Competition for visitor dollars comes in all forms such as other destinations as well as the purchase of a new HD TV or appliance for the home rather than the long weekend getaway. It is so important to consistently remind potential travelers that your destination offers such benefits as rest, relaxation, activities and enjoyment for a short time in a busy life.

4) What is your biggest wish for the industry in the next year?

I sincerely hope that our elected officials at every level are able to recognize a golden goose and feed it. In this economy I can only think of one industry in which a dollar is invested and it brings at least an eight dollar return to the city, county, state or national coffers.

5) What is your ultimate career goal?

I think this is it. Taking the lead at the Lake Havasu City CVB is my third "prom"! I hope we can have the success here that I have enjoyed in my previous two positions as CEO.

6) If you didn't have this job, what job would you want?

Anthony Bourdain's job or at least be his assistant!!

7) What were some of your previous jobs?

Many years ago (I think when Arizona first became a state!) I was an apprentice pharmacist! Shortly after that I entered the travel & tourism arena. In the past 12 years, I have served as President/CEO of the Corpus Christi, Texas CVB and President/CEO of the Sedona Chamber of Commerce.

8) Whom do you most admire and why?

The list is so very long so I'll concentrate on this industry – David Radcliffe, a brilliant tourism strategist; Margie Emmermann who came from a banking background and literally swept through our industry with fresh, vibrant eyes and brought Arizona tourism to enviable heights; Barry Aarons, a consensus builder and tireless advocate of hundreds of thousands of tourism jobs; Jennifer Wesselhoff, a young, driven, brilliant "doer" who is setting the CEO performance bar pretty high; Rachael Sacco, Stephanie Nowack, Sherri Henry all of whom have been tremendous mentors and community servants; and John Hoffman who taught me the business of tourism. There are many more that I could write a book!

9) What is your favorite Arizona experience?

I have two — Jet skiing from Lake Havasu City to Laughlin on the Colorado River and visiting my grandsons in Flagstaff; one of whom will bring world peace and the other will enforce it!

10) What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Free time? Can I get a definition on that?

11) What is a common misconception about you?

I think a common one is that I'm a "tough cookie." The reality is that I really try to listen to all sides and let the good stuff marinate. I'm not hesitant to admit if I think I'm wrong.

12) What is something that not even your closest friends know about you?

If I told you, my closest friends would know because they all read AOT's communications!!

AOT Events

AOT Conducts Seattle/Portland Area Sales Mission

Kristy Swanson, AOT's Travel Industry Marketing Specialist, joined Kimberly Janes from the Chandler Office of Tourism, April Bourie from the Metro Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), and Shawn Lewis from the Tempe CVB on the Seattle/Portland Area Sales Mission January 26-30. The group conducted destination training with Travel Connection, a leading wholesaler in the Seattle/Portland area. Promotional materials were distributed at each office including the new Professional Traveler's Planning Guide for Arizona, the Chandler Visitor's Guide, Tucson brochure, the Tempe Visitor Guide, SunnyArizona brochure, and an informational flier on the new Arizona Accreditation Program (AZAP). In total, nearly 150 travel counselors were reached.

For more information please contact Kristy Swanson at 602-364-3696 or via e-mail at kswanson@azot.gov.

Reach the Mexican Market at the 3rd Annual Arizona Road Show

The Arizona Office of Tourism will target Mexican tour operators and travel agents at the 3rd Annual Arizona Road Show to be held in Mexico City and Guadalajara, March 23 - 27. The Road Show will highlight destination seminars for travel agents in Mexico City and Guadalajara, tour operator sales calls and dinner in Mexico City and a media breakfast in Mexico City. Registration cost is \$1,500, all other expenses are extra.

For more information please contact Loretta Belonio at lbelonio@azot.gov or 602-364-3725.

Upcoming Events

Event – AAA California Sales Mission

Date – February 9-13

Location – Southern California

Event – Expo Vacaciones and U.S. Travel Association See America Media Marketplace

Date – February 16-18

Location – Mexico City, Mexico

Event – Toronto Golf & Travel Show

Date – February 27-March 1, 2009

Location – Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Industry News

Grand Canyon National Park to Celebrate 90th Anniversary!

Grand Canyon National Park will be celebrating its 90th Anniversary Thursday, February 26 at 1:30 p.m. along with a celebratory opening of the Verkamp's Visitor Center with a ribbon cutting ceremony. The event is open to the public and will take place at the Verkamp's Visitor Center located near the historic El Tovar in Grand Canyon Village on the South Rim. Special programs will be offered by the Grand Canyon National Park interpretive staff to commemorate this historic day and visitors will be invited to join park staff for cake and punch following the event.

For more information about the 90th Anniversary celebration and celebratory opening of Verkamp's Visitor Center, please contact Grand Canyon Public Affairs Officer Maureen Oltrogge at (928) 638-7779 or David Smith, Park Naturalist at (928) 638-7765.

For more information about visiting Grand Canyon National Park, go to the park's Web site at <http://www.nps.gov/grca> or call (928) 638-7888.

The Travel Community Supports President Obama's Pick for Secretary of Commerce

The U.S. Travel Association (formerly the Travel Industry Association) praised President Obama for his choice of Senator Judd Gregg as his nominee for Secretary of Commerce. Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association, issued the following statement:

"America's travel community applauds President Obama for choosing Senator Gregg to lead a cabinet department that will play such a critical role in revitalizing the U.S. economy. We look forward to working with Senator Gregg in support of a nationally coordinated travel promotion program to boost the U.S. economy and strengthen America's image abroad by welcoming more overseas travelers to the United States. "America's \$1.7 trillion travel economy employs one out of every eight U.S. workers in domestic jobs that cannot be outsourced. From his previous experience as Governor of the State of New Hampshire, Senator Gregg understands that travel is an economic engine that creates jobs and generates tax revenues in every state and region of the United States."

International Visits Up 6% Through November

The Department of Commerce says 47 million international visitors traveled to the U.S. during the first 11 months of 2008, an increase of almost 6 percent over the same period in 2007. In November, total visitation, total visitation was 3.6 million, down 9 percent when compared to November 2007. International visitors spent \$131.8 billion from January through November 2008, an increase of 19 percent over the first 11 months of 2007. Total spending through November has exceeded the full-year record spending in 2007 of \$122.3 billion. Year-to-date, Canadian visitation grew 7 percent over the same period in 2007, driven by land arrivals, up 8 percent. Arrivals from Mexico for visitors traveling to interior points decreased 7 percent during the first 11 months of 2008. Visitation from Western Europe was down 6 percent for November and up 14 percent year-to-date. Details at 202-482-0140. (*Special to TA*)

PWC Forecasts Decline in 2009 Revenue Per Available Room

PricewaterhouseCoopers has issued a revised lodging forecast that illustrates the effects of the sharp deceleration of the U.S. economy on the U.S. lodging industry. Based on current forecasts for the U.S. economy and historical data from Smith Travel Research, PwC forecasts an 11.2 percent decrease in revenue per available room during 2009, after a 1.9 percent decline in 2008. The decline in RevPAR in 2009 is driven by marked declines in both occupancy and average

daily room rates. Occupancy is expected to decline by 3.9 percentage points to 56.5 percent, primarily due to year-over-year declines in demand through the third quarter of 2009.

(www.TravelPulse.com, 2/4)

Niche Firms Gaining Ground Against Online Travel Giants

Online travel sites are searching for ways to reap advertising dollars from people who browse but don't buy from Orbitz or its peers. According to Forrester Research Inc., nearly half of the traffic to online travel agencies consists of people who check out hotel or air fare options, then book directly with the supplier to get a better deal or avoid paying a \$5 transaction fee. People are traveling less and researching trips in greater detail as the economy worsens, analysts say; And they're giving more weight to the experiences and opinions of fellow travelers in making vacation decisions. The trend is helping to foster a cottage industry of small, niche sites like Chicago's iExplore, which is devoted to adventure travel, even as it provides challenges to traditional travel powerhouses.

The number of "lookers," who noodle around travel Web sites, is expected to grow far more rapidly than "bookers," who buy from online travel agencies, over the next five years, predicted Henry Harteveldt, travel analyst for Forrester Research. Harteveldt thinks online agencies "really need to evolve into media companies." He envisions a strong ad push to make money off people who just browse the site for deals, and new user interfaces that arm customers with details on not only airline fees but also in-flight entertainment systems, seating upgrades and other data that can make a huge difference on long trips. (www.ChicagoTribune.com/Business)

Passport Applications Plunge in Recession

With the recession choking foreign travel, passport applications are plunging and the workload at the State Department is easing enough that those applying are getting their documents in three weeks or less. The State Department said that it expected to issue 12 million passports this fiscal year, about 25 percent fewer than last year. In early December, it was forecasting 17 million passports for the year ending Sept. 30. Demand has fallen so quickly that the State Department has made what an official called "painful reductions" in contract employees, those who perform tasks such as processing payments and keying in data. No cuts were planned in the full-time passport staff, at least at this time.

For Americans planning to take advantage of lower-priced airfares and tour packages, a short window of opportunity has opened to get their passports quickly. "It's a fabulous time to apply," said Brenda Sprague, the department's assistant secretary for passport services. Tougher border rules are scheduled to take effect June 1, and that will affect millions of people who travel by car. The key change would require Americans to show a passport, a new ID called a passport card or other high-security ID to cross the Mexican and Canadian borders.

(www.LosAngelesTimes.com/Business)

The Upside of the Down Economy

Some hotel guests are reaping the benefits of the worst downturn in the nation's \$140 billion hotel industry since the travel industry's collapse in the months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The current recession has led Americans to put the brakes on travel--long viewed as a key measure of Americans' confidence in their financial situation--and led hotels to turn on vacancy signs as occupancy rates have plunged. For those who do travel, there can be an upside, says USA Today: bargain rates, less-crowded hotels and rooms available at the last minute at popular hotels. Many are also enjoying improved service and special treatment, such as free upgrades to suites or club floors, as hotels roll out the red carpet to try to attract and hold on to customers.. Hotels are

adjusting by cutting back on dining room hours and eliminating some amenities. (*Page 1A, USA Today*)

State Parks Board Votes to Review all Agency Budget Options

Today the Arizona State Parks Board voted not to close eight State Parks as proposed by staff. That was a possible solution to massive sweeps from the funds State Parks uses to operate. The millions of dollars in diversions from the agency back to the General Fund by the State Legislature has created a cash flow issue for the agency as it operates on the cash it generates from gate fees. By the end of June the agency is looking at a deficit of \$647,000 and cash flowing into the system is sluggish.

The State Parks Board voted today to review all the options it has before going to full closures of eight State Parks. Those solutions will be discussed at a regular February 20 Board meeting. Also under review are the timing and methods for disbursement of funds for community projects. Many of those projects are already under construction, but funds for projects will be swept out of agency accounts by February 28.

"We understand the budget crisis the State is facing, and we have contributed millions of dollars into the General Fund that come from conservation user fees, but our job is to protect Arizona's natural, cultural and recreational resources," said Executive Director, Ken Travous. "For the next two weeks we will be exploring every possible option so we can present solutions to the State Parks Board. These options include park closures as well as employees going on Leave Without Pay, not filling 27 critical vacancies, possible furloughs, seasonal closings, shorter days open to the public, and many others."

"We were pleased that so many people testified at our emergency meeting today, sent letters and offered support for these parks and programs. The public's continued involvement in this State Park budget process is critical to protect both parks and programs. At the February 20th meeting we will have a much bigger room so the public can participate in the hardest decisions our Board will have to make," said Reese Woodling, the State Parks Board Chair.

For more information about Arizona State Parks call (602) 542-4174 (outside of the Phoenix metro area call toll-free (800) 285-3703) or visit azstateparks.com.

Mrs. Laura Bush Designates Tombstone, Arizona a Preserve America Community

Tombstone, Arizona was recently honored when First Lady Laura Bush, Honorary Chair of the Preserve America initiative, designated it as one of the nation's newest Preserve America Communities.

"Preserve America Communities demonstrate that they are committed to preserving America's heritage while ensuring a future filled with opportunities for learning and enjoyment," Mrs. Bush said. "This community designation program, combined with the Preserve America Grant Program, Preserve America Presidential Awards, and other federal support, provides strong incentives for continued preservation of our cultural and natural heritage resources. I commend you for your commitment to preserving an important part of our nation's historic past for visitors, neighbors, and, most importantly, for children."

Dustin L. Escapule, Mayor of the City of Tombstone received a letter and will receive a certificate of designation signed by Mrs. Bush announcing Tombstone is now a Preserve America Community. Communities designated through the program receive national recognition for their efforts. Benefits include the right to use the Preserve America logo on signs and promotional

materials; eligibility for Preserve America Grants; notification to state tourism offices; and listing in a Web-based directory that showcases Tombstone's preservation efforts and heritage tourism destinations. Preserve America Communities are also featured in National Register Travel Itineraries and in "Teaching With Historic Places" curricular materials created by the National Park Service.

In 2006, Preserve America Grants totaling nearly \$5 million were awarded to 68 projects around the country. Nearly \$5 million will be awarded in 2007, as well. President Bush's fiscal year 2008 budget requests \$10 million in grant funds for which designated Preserve America Communities may apply. Grants of \$20,000 to \$150,000 are awarded on a competitive, matching fund basis to help communities develop sustainable management strategies and sound business practices for the continued preservation and use of their heritage assets. The grants support research, planning, marketing, interpretation, and training efforts.

The Preserve America initiative is a White House effort to encourage and support community efforts to preserve and enjoy America's priceless cultural and natural heritage. The goals of the initiative include a greater shared knowledge about the nation's past; strengthened regional identities and local pride; increased local participation in preserving the country's cultural and natural heritage assets; and support for the economic vitality of our communities.

"Sustainable historic preservation is a wise investment in the future, not a cost for maintaining the past. Communities and the nation receive significant economic, educational, and cultural benefits, including heritage tourism, in return for their preservation efforts," said John L. Nau, III, chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, which administers Preserve America programs for the White House in cooperation with the Department of the Interior.

The White House is working with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, and Transportation, the General Services Administration, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the President's Council on Environmental Quality, and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities to implement Preserve America. For more information about the initiative and its programs, visit www.preserveamerica.gov.

Calendar of Events

Visit www.ArizonaGuide.com to find information on all the exciting **events, festivals and activities** held throughout the Grand Canyon State!